

*Aotearoa*  
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*Working New Zealand: Stuck in the doldrums*

**Corporate New Zealand is  
SAILING AWAY**

**Climate Change**

**French Elections**

**Fay Richwhite**

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# A grim illustration of the gap between rich and poor



**P**erhaps the most disturbing event of the last few months was the death of Auckland woman Folole Muliaga. Mrs Muliaga died after her life support system was denied electricity, along with the rest of the house after state-owned Mercury Energy cut off supply when the family had fallen behind in their bill payments.

This tragedy is a grim illustration of the growing gap between rich and poor in New Zealand. The backdrop to this tragedy in the media has been the America's Cup boat race – an unabashed attempt to whip up popular enthusiasm for a celebration of corporate wealth.

We could, like many liberal commentators, detail the way that the Muliaga family struggled to pay off their bills, and point to the growing gap between the average wage and the cost of living. But this reaction only diminishes the sense of outrage every decent person will feel. The statistical picture points clearly to an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor in New Zealand – in May, a

financial survey showed that mortgage repayments on a median Auckland house would eat up 99.95 per cent of the average weekly Auckland take-home pay. But when these statistics are so brutally illustrated, it is not enough merely to "defend" those who are crucified by bills from landlords or power companies by offering excuses. *Socialist Review* starts from a radically different point of view: Mrs Muliaga deserved not only the right to decent medical care, but also to electricity, water, and every other thing essential to life and health. She deserves this because she, along with all other working class New Zealanders, was the ultimate creator of all of this wealth. Today we have a situation where the expensive exploits of the idle rich are praised to the skies, while mortgages and living costs drive increasing numbers of people into indebtedness.

This is not a situation unique to New Zealand, nor has it occurred out of nowhere. In the face of two to three decades of relentless attacks on working class living standards – from the era of Margaret Thatcher and Roger Douglas to the present – working people have been abandoned by the political parties of the left that pretended to represent our interests in the past. In this issue, we look at the role of the Labour Party in privatising the state-owned railways system and two of the Great Train Robbers – Michael Fay and David Richwhite – who were also great supporters of the America's Cup. We also look at NZ workers fighting back – the best recent example is the defence of Subway worker Jackie Lang. Lang was laid off from Subway on the flimsiest excuse. She could so easily have fallen through the cracks, but did not, because she had a union behind her. Joining your union is the most basic starting point for anyone that's interested in human progress. Unions are organised on principles of democracy and solidarity. A good union is living proof that the best way for working people to get ahead is to look after their mates, and that the best way to organise is democratically. But joining the union



*Financial Vampire: David Richwhite, who has settled a \$20m insider trading case out of court. The merchant banker was in Spain supporting Emirates Team New Zealand at the time.*

is not enough on its own. Unions are dominated by bureaucrats who scarcely struggle to defend existing rights, let alone lead a fight-back. The main focus for activists now has to be to pierce through the fog of political directionlessness that stifles the ability of working people to fight back. This fog is not only created by the ruling class and their lackeys, it is as much the creation of the old-time union bureaucracy, the reformist Labour Party, and the old Stalinist left. In France, the Socialist Party (which is equivalent to the New Zealand Labour Party) and the stalinist Communist Party are in electoral meltdown as their supporters become increasingly disillusioned by "reformism without reforms". In this issue, we publish an article written for *Socialist Review* by French revolutionary John Mullen, the editor of *Socialisme International*, that looks at strategies to build the radical left.

On a more optimistic note, our back page highlights the inspiring strides taken in Venezuela towards a new, more equal society. However this drama unfolds, the struggle of Chavez and millions of Venezuelans and other Latin Americans have certainly put socialism on the agenda for the 21st century.

Mike Tait

# Sacked and charged over one cup of Coke!

*In an almost unbelievable display of casual cruelty, Subway worker Jackie Lang was sacked and charged with theft for sharing a drink with a friend.*

It's a story that has been headline news in Australia, but virtually ignored by the local daily, the Otago Daily Times. Lang shared a cup of diet coke with her friend, then refilled the cup and left it on the table while she went back to work. Subway management caught her on security camera, and apparently considered this a crime. Lang was summoned to meeting with management on March 19 without being told it was a disciplinary matter or given a chance to have union representation, and was blind-sided with accusations of theft. "I shared my drink with my friend. I was only trying to comfort her. Isn't that what most people would do?"

Isn't that what most people would do?" Lang told the *Sunday Star-Times*. "Most people wouldn't be fired and put in a police cell for two hours for sharing a drink." Bill Clark, organiser for the Autonomous Workers Union (AWU), which represents workers in a number of Dunedin fast food outlets, said he has

never seen such an extreme example of corporate bullying.

Supporters of the AWU, including Young Labour and the International Socialist Organisation, have organised pickets outside Subway, including a loud and angry 50-strong march from the university campus to the restaurant on 8 May. Lang has filed a personal grievance claim against Subway, saying that management's actions had shocked and embarrassed her, and losing her job had caused her financial hardship. She was also up in court on charges of theft, but the police dropped the charges; no doubt they were embarrassed by protest action and media coverage. The AWU has launched an appeal to help cover her legal costs, and protests are likely to continue.

It is ironic that it was the local branch of Young Labour that called the 8 May protest. Since 1984, the Labour Party has played a leading role in wrecking the job security and living

standards of working people. Labour's neo-liberal restructuring in the 1980s resulted in mass redundancies and unemployment on a scale not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. High unemployment then allowed the National Government to attack unions head-on in the 1990s with the

Employment Contracts Act.

The current Labour Government loosened some of the more draconian restrictions on unions of that law, but crucially kept restrictions on the right to strike in place. Workers are only allowed to strike during contract negotiations. Once a contract is in place, strikes are banned. Strikes in support of other workers are also forbidden by the "Labour" government. Not surprisingly, most unions have disaffiliated from the Labour Party, and party membership is in long-term decline.

Of course, legal restrictions on unions are only a sign of the weakness of the movement – or its leadership. The trade union movement was built despite numerous legal barriers. The right of workers to organise was only recognised legally when it had already happened in reality, despite state and business opposition.

If Jackie Lang had not belonged to a trade union, Subway would have been able to get away with their vicious abuse of her rights, and organising on the job is still the only way that working New Zealanders will ever get a share of the economic recovery. But this won't happen until organised workers break with the illusion that Labour Party is anything other than a pillar of the bosses' system, and trust in our own power.

Mike Tait



# Great train robbers get away with millions

**D**uring the '80s and '90s, NZ's public assets were sold off at bargain basement prices to international financiers. There is no better example of this enormous rip-off than the theft of our public transport system.

In late June this year, the Securities Commission, a government agency tasked with preventing business fraud, settled an insider-trading court case with Midavia, a company belonging to America's Cup stalwarts Sir Michael Fay and David Richwhite - the great train robbers. The Securities Commission head, Jane Diplock, congratulated herself for having won a \$20 million out-of-court settlement:

The settlement specifically did not include an admission of guilt on the part of Midavia, even though Diplock told National Radio that she was convinced that Fay and Richwhite were guilty of a multi-million dollar insider trading scam. In other words, the government agency responsible for preventing industrial-scale theft settled for \$20 million, even though Fay and Richwhite's Midavia Rail company made \$63 million selling off Tranzrail shares directly before the price plummeted. Worse still, they made this dirty deal even though they knew Fay and Richwhite were guilty of insider trading. The Securities Commission is now waiting for legal advice on how to divvy up the \$20 million amongst the investors conned by Fay and Richwhite. One thing is certain though: those that built the rail system - the working people of this country - will never see a cent of this money.

### Essential transport

Richard Prebble, the useful idiot of the international financial vampires, writes in his puerile work, *I've Been Thinking*, that: "When I became Minister of Railways, New Zealand Rail was not only losing a million dollars a day it was also losing customers, freight and sometimes whole wagons as well." Prebble solved this crisis by losing the entire New Zealand transport system. In 1990, he made New Zealand Rail into



**N**ew Zealand's transport system is sick. Like a heart patient, our transport arteries are sclerotic. The only major city, Auckland, is likely to be strangled by its own dependence on motorcars and trucks within the next decade or two. New Zealand has the largest car fleet per head of population in the world and also the oldest. Boy racers are demonised, but they do nothing more than take their elders' obsession with speed and power one step further. Steam engines are paraded on public holidays as relics of a bygone age. There are few countries as spread out and internally remote as New Zealand, and even fewer without any regular public transport between major cities. Our dependence on motorcars and trucks for private and commercial transport is not a reflection of our advanced economy - it is a reflection of the free-market policies blindly promoted by Labour and National in the last two decades.

a state-owned enterprise, as a prelude to sale. To make it attractive to the market, thousands of rail workers were consigned to the dole line, debts of up to \$1.2 billion were written off and \$360 million was spent upgrading rolling stock. In 1990, a National government took power and carried on with Prebble's work. Fay and Richwhite were brought in as consultants to prepare the bank for sale, and in 1993 it was sold for \$328.3 million - that's less than what the government had spent on upgrading rolling stock alone. The single largest shareholders were, unsurprisingly, Fay and Richwhite. And then, after riding the gravy train for a decade, the Securities Commission says that David Richwhite, then a director of Tranzrail, tipped off Midavia that Tranzrail's stocks were set to slide. Midavia then sold off

early, making a killing for Fay and Richwhite.

### Who is to blame?

This is not the only fast one Fay and Richwhite have pulled. But let's be clear, you can't blame a mosquito for sucking blood. It is in the nature of a conman to take every advantage that he can. The real criminals are the Labour politicians - David Lange and Helen Clark as much as Richard Prebble - who, by pretending to politically represent working people, have robbed us of any way of defending ourselves from the bloodsuckers. We won't be able to achieve decent public transport until we've driven the profit motive out of the system - and that will take a movement that's not deluded by Labour's lies.

*Mike Tait*

# The Bolger Years

**T**he Bolger years in New Zealand lasted from late 1990 until 1997, and were marked by the biggest attacks on trade unions and welfare beneficiaries ever seen in this country. Starting with a series of announcements in late 1990 and then the "Mother of All Budgets" in 1991, the National Government deepened the neoliberal reform process begun by the Fourth Labour Government. The primary outcome was a significant rise in socio-economic inequality, one which, incidentally, has continued under the Fifth Labour Government.

Unemployment rose rapidly in the early 1990s, peaking at around 11.5 percent overall in 1992, though for Maori and Pacific People it was much higher, and in 1992 just over 25 percent of all Maori in the workforce were unemployed. Demand for assistance at food banks exploded and poverty levels not seen since the 1930s Depression were reached. Throughout the 1990s National also conducted a vicious anti-beneficiary campaign.

At the end of April the Stout Research Centre at the University of Victoria ran a two-day conference called "The Bolger Years". The conference was the seventh in a series which examine the events of past administrations, with the previous one covering the first term of the Fourth Labour Government under David Lange. The Bolger Years conference itself featured all the key players in the Bolger administration – Ruth Richardson and Jenny Shipley – the two right-wing ministers

who ran the Finance and Welfare portfolios, Bill Birch – the man who transformed himself from the free-spending Keynesian via the Think Big project in the 1970s and '80s to a mean-spirited neoliberal of the mid-1990s, Bolger himself for a short period, and a cast of lesser lights from the National Government of the day.

It was clear from the outset that the conference was not going to be the venue for any critical reflection on the events of the 1990s and their impact on people. Instead, many of the speakers appeared to have a two-fold agenda: first, to prove how long they had personally known Jim Bolger and what a great guy he was, and second, to write themselves into an important role in this tragic period of NZ history. There was no embarrassment at

the rising levels of poverty that their party had created – indeed there was no mention by any of the speakers of the hardship their policies had caused.

One of the worst speakers at the Conference, and there were plenty to choose from, was Ken Douglas, the former CTU head and prominent member of the now-defunct Socialist Unity Party. Douglas spent much of his speech rubbishing his fellow trade union members for being too thick to see what was going to happen once National was elected in 1990, stating that he was always clear about what was going to happen. He also seemed proud of the fact that he had been pilloried within the trade union movement for his role in the selling out of the Employment Contracts

### *Act protests in the 1990s*

Contracts Act protests in the 1990s – when more decisive leadership from the CTU might well have been able to force changes to the legislation. After all

National had buckled under the continued protests of pensioners to reverse some of the harshest aspects of the reforms affecting them. Ruth Richardson, still a free market zealot after all these years, made an as-to-be expected speech in which she criticised Bolger for losing his nerve and for not going far enough with the reform process. She also noted that many of the reforms initiated by her had not been amended by the current Labour Government. The only highlight of the conference was the final session where Doug Graham and others discussed the National Party decision to act to address Maori grievances. Whatever the criticisms that can be made of the generosity of the settlements and the time it has taken to work through claims and their durability,



*Architect of disaster: PM Bolger presided over the destruction of workers' rights during the 1990s.*

it can't be denied that Bolger Government did make progress in this area – an area of policy one would not normally associate with a conservative political party.

However, the highly-publicised settlements disguised the fact that working class Maori were hardest hit by mass unemployment and benefit cuts. The Treaty settlements played into the hands of racists who argued that Maori were living off the fat of the land, while the "white" working class was suffering. In reality, the settlements provide real financial benefits only to a small Maori elite.

Overall the conference provided evidence for the lack of critical analysis conducted in New Zealand. Given the significance of these reforms they should have provided an opportunity for reflection and criticisms but that is too much to expect from those who have most benefited from the reforms.

*Gerry Cotterell*

# Global warming: How should the left respond?

*The Stern Review has created a dramatic shift in the debate over global warming. Every prominent capitalist now wants to promote their green credentials, with Rupert Murdoch leading the way by making his media empire carbon-neutral – and he received warm congratulations from the Greens for his profitable efforts.*

Even Howard has changed his rhetoric to try to relate to a tidal wave of opinion, but he's still committed to the coal industry. That's why he stridently advocates the development of technology for the sequestration of carbon emissions, for which he now has the authority of the Stern Review. Most significantly, he sees an opportunity to justify the introduction of nuclear power.

On the other hand, masses of people demonstrated around the globe on the international day of action against global warming. However, despite people at the demos being much like protesters at any rally – opposed to the war, worried about where society is going – there is nothing progressive about the political positions argued around this issue by the key political forces driving it.

The mainstream environmentalists, the Greens, the ALP and the Liberals all promote pro-capitalist "solutions". The consensus on global warming fits like a glove with the ruling class agenda for user-pays and cuts to workers' living standards. At the rally in Sydney, Green Party leader Bob Brown declared: "Our task is...to pull our belts in, pay a little more and use the technology and opportunity this wonderful country has to take a lead in the world and turn around the menace of climate change."

When Howard told the Business Council of Australia that "we have to examine ... how we might devise an emissions trading system which ... maintains the competitive advantage that this country enjoys in the industries that are familiar to you", Don Henry, head of the Australian Conservation Foundation, welcomed it: "What needs to happen is the group [to be set up to enquire into carbon trading] needs to recommend that we achieve deep cuts in greenhouse pollution and then find an efficient way for business to achieve that."

Some capitalists see global warming as an opportunity to win support for their three-decades-long campaign to cut workers' living standards via user pays, and transfer wealth to themselves via handouts for investing in "green"

industries. They rely on the classless view that as we're all threatened by catastrophe, we have to pull together, to provide a further justification for their neoliberal agenda.

Disgracefully, they have all too many allies among environmentalists who are pushing for "green" taxes and who emphasise individual sacrifice with no clear differentiation between the mass of people and the capitalists who are the actual polluters.

Many people are convinced they should pay more for necessities such as power. A survey done a few days after the Stern Review hit the news found that 63 per cent were prepared to pay extra for power and water to help the environment.

Of course, lots of people see it as similar to support for higher taxes to fund health and education. It highlights the humanity and collective spirit of the mass of people, on which the capitalists rely. Nevertheless, the

arguments to convince workers to pay more are reactionary as they simply feed into the capitalists' neo-liberal agenda.

## Who should pay?

One of the reasons people have been convinced to pay to save the environment is that they're told all the time it's so costly, it can't possibly happen without sacrifices. This is an absolute lie. The Iraq war alone has cost more than the predictions of what the Kyoto Agreement – which environmental activists promote as going quite a way towards tackling the problems – would have cost the US and Australia.

A systematic estimate of the cost of Kyoto by William Nordhaus and Joseph Boyer of Yale University gave the figure of US\$325 billion over many decades for the US. But in only three years, the cost of the Iraq war is over US\$500 billion.

The Stern Review says it would take 1 per cent of world GDP to fix global warming.



*Eco-vandalism: the drive for profit is producing climate chaos. It will not be solved by green taxes and carbon markets*

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND CAPITALISM

His targets are inadequate compared with those proposed by many environmentalists. But nonetheless, the absolute waste in the system far outstrips 1 per cent.

Let's be clear. No capitalist is planning to pay to save the environment. They are insisting that the market can solve the problems if new technologies are made profitable by government.

The market probably can force a shift in energy production if enough capitalists make profits out of it. But even if the market can do this, it will be done in a way to benefit capitalists while the poorest pay. It will not solve other massive problems of environmental destruction; and it will cause a new round of problems because it will not be planned on the basis of scientific advice, but done in the chaotic, inhuman way the market operates.

Carbon trading – which is basically a market in pollution – is one mechanism to assist this process by making carbon more expensive and therefore alternative energy more competitive. However, it just allows polluters to continue polluting. The European experience illustrates the problems. In the first phase of the program – January 2005 until the end of 2007 – European governments handed out more permits than were needed. So companies were permitted to increase carbon emissions! And the "value" of the permits on the market has crashed, making pollution cheap.

This is one of the problems with the environmental campaign around global warming. Even though many campaigners point out that Kyoto is insufficient, they mostly argue about the targets set – 5 per cent reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> in 50 years as against the 60 to 90 per cent many scientists claim is needed. But the key defect in Kyoto is that it relies on market mechanisms.

The debate needs to be about challenging the market, making demands on governments such as the nationalisation of utilities like power and transport. The Greens in Victoria are for ending privatisation of rail and trams, but they don't advocate nationalising electricity generation, talking instead of the business opportunities in the solar industry.

Demands that governments provide free, extensive transport systems and cheap, clean power, raise the idea that we don't have to accept the limits of the market – just as support for a free health or education system cuts against the idea that capitalists should profit from them.

To date in the present debate, many prominent environmentalists sound like advisers to the bosses about how to profit

from global warming. George Monbiot, a campaigner who does challenge the logic of capitalism, pointed out how concerns about global warming can be exploited when it's left to the market:

"In promoting biodiesel – as thousands of environmental campaigners do – you might imagine that you are creating a market for old chip fat, or rapeseed oil, or oil from algae grown in desert ponds. In reality you are creating a market for the most destructive crop on earth."

Palm oil plantations to produce biodiesel were responsible for 87 per cent of deforestation in Malaysia between 1985 and 2000. In Sumatra and Borneo, some 4 million hectares of forest has been converted to palms.

If it's left to market forces, chances are the capitalists, who caused the environmental mess, will create a new lot of problems under the guise of "tackling global warming".

## Supporting capitalists won't save the planet

Bob Brown never tires of arguing that Australia should become one of the biggest exporters of solar technology. In a recent media release he emphasised the huge business opportunities for green energy investors. And in a Lateline interview he argued:

"We are being bypassed in a renewable energy industry, which in the next 15 years is going to see investment of some US\$2 trillion. And the Howard Government, rather than being ... opportunistic here, is being caught in this coal blind alley ... when we have got this proven technology, which we should be promoting."

Such pro-capitalist, nationalist arguments lead the movement into a genuine blind alley of capitalist power strengthened by popular notions that "we" all benefit from investments of trillions of dollars over which we have no control.

In so far as environmentalists encourage people to cooperate with capitalists who invest in "green" industries, it strengthens the power of the very class which has got us into this mess, which lives by exploitation, which cannot be trusted to do anything other than line their own pockets, and who are a block to building a society in which the problems could genuinely be tackled.

Global warming, even if the direst predictions are correct, does not override other political considerations. No matter how urgently change is needed, it will not hasten the day when we live on a clean, healthy planet if workers drop campaigns aimed at maintaining living standards.

In fact, every victory against neoliberal

attacks, every victory to stymie the capitalists' agenda, whether it's war, attacks on democratic rights or attacks on welfare, is far more important than some capitalists investing in "green" enterprises. Because the problem is social, not technological. If a mass movement had been able to stop the Iraq war, the funds would have been available to start dealing with global warming.

There is plenty of wealth to fund research. The obstacle to this happening is capitalist society and its vested interests.

Socialists are opposed to "green" taxes unless they are clearly aimed at penalising business. Otherwise they will inevitably mean transfers of wealth from the poorest to the richest. Think of the carbon taxes the New Zealand government is planning, or the NSW Labor government's plans for \$1 a week on power bills while massive subsidies flow into both polluters like the aluminium industry.

We need to oppose all nuclear developments. The nuclear power cycle is a sure-fire route to nuclear weapons. This is precisely why Howard has jumped on the bandwagon; he hopes he can lay the basis for nuclear weapons in line with Australia's imperialist interests while covering it with a green smokescreen. Socialists demand the nationalisation of basic utilities and provision of services on the basis of need, with the biggest users, i.e. industry, paying higher tariffs for power and water. Governments should run power, water and transport services on the cleanest basis available and on the basis of society's needs, not to make profits.

All subsidies to carbon-polluting industries – which amount to something like \$5 to \$6.5 billion a year in Australia – should cease and the money go to research into alternative sources of energy and extending public transport systems.

Deforestation should stop, and governments should force developers to build energy-efficient structures with no added costs to workers. Infrastructure to protect areas threatened by inundation should be built, forward planning should be aimed at sheltering and feeding environmental refugees, and borders should be open. The list could go on.

We have to completely oppose the idea that workers can only demand what business can make money from. Capitalism is a system of chaos, crisis, war and exploitation. How could its methods contribute to saving even a fraction of the globe, let alone the whole earth?

*from Socialist Alternative*

# The Greens shift to the right

**"We have always been open to working with National and we will continue to work with them, issue by issue."** Green Party co-leader Russel Norman's endorsement of a possible post-2008 election coalition with the conservative National Party shocked many who saw the Greens as the only "left" party left in Parliament.

But while the Greens have cultivated a progressive image, they are as committed to running the capitalist system in the interests of business as Labour or National.

This is perhaps most clearly shown by their support for NZ's "interventions" in East Timor and the Solomons. While opposing NZ's military role in Afghanistan in 2001, the Greens have no fundamental differences with the ruling class over its imperialist overseas ambitions, and they have been enthusiastic supporters of the military's reconfiguration to allow NZ to independently deploy forces in its "sphere of influence" in the South Pacific and South-East Asia.

For the party leadership, the key problem is that its support base consists of three groups with quite different (and irreconcilable) interests.

The first group are disillusioned Labour and Alliance (the now-defunct left-wing break-away from Labour) supporters who have some notional commitment to working class politics. The second group are small business owners who rely on New Zealand's "clean and green" image to market their products or services overseas. They want the sort of free market policies implemented by Labour and National since 1984 but with a green veneer.

Finally, a significant number of younger voters support the Greens based on their image as being in some sense anti-establishment.

Clearly, the Greens will find it impossible to satisfy these disparate groups, and behind the vague rhetoric about "going beyond left or right," the real conflict within the party is about which of these support bases to appeal to.

Following their 2002 election success,



*Greenwash: Green Party co-leader Russel Norman is keen to grab a sponge and start greenwashing National*

the Greens faced a barrage of attacks from big business and the media. This led to an influx of new, younger members attracted to what they assumed - based on these attacks - must be a progressive, left-wing organisation. The Greens quickly became the biggest and most active political group on the university campuses, and Green conferences were notable for their vibrancy and youthfulness. Ironically though, this situation played into the hands of the party's right-wing, who convinced these new and politically inexperienced members that they needed to "moderate" their stance in order to appear more "responsible" and gain votes.

Unsurprisingly, the Greens lost much of their younger support base as a result, and polled only 5.3 per cent in the September 2005 elections, compared to 7.0 per cent in 2002.

As one writer put it, "The major problem with the Greens can be summed up in a phrase: the veneer is radical but the substance is not. Ultimately the Greens are committed to

reforming rather than transforming the existing capitalist system." Instead of arguing for a real alternative to the environmentally destructive capitalist system and embracing and promoting the young, activist membership, "going beyond left or right" in reality has meant a commitment to maintaining every aspect of the exploitative, destructive and unequal capitalist system, supporting the ruling class in its imperial ambitions and cosying up to the two big parties of free market economics.

While some Green MPs may mouth off a few radical sounding phrases now, give them a couple of years in government and there can be little doubt that, like their German counterparts, the NZ Greens will be happily voting to deploy troops overseas, sending in the riot cops to break up environmental protests, and supporting further tax cuts for the rich.

*Andrew Cooper  
for Socialist Alternative*

# What is socialism?

***"You socialists seem to be against a lot of things, but what are you for?" This is a common question. What we oppose also shows what we are for: troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, no to racism, an end to poverty, workers' rights, to name just a few. But our ultimate aim is socialism - a classless society in which the productive wealth would be under democratic control.***

It's easy to see what a classless society could achieve when you look at the insane distribution of wealth. The Forbes rich list published in early March showed how the wealthiest 946 individuals in the world have increased their wealth by 35 per cent in one year to US\$3.5 trillion. That is almost 7 per cent of world GDP.

Meanwhile three billion people worldwide live on less than two dollars a day. The wealth squandered by these human leeches could be liberated to feed, house, clothe and educate many millions. Then there is the US\$1.3 trillion wasted every year on military spending.

But socialism is not just about spreading existing wealth, but unleashing the creativity that is currently stifled by capitalism. With around 30 per cent unemployed or underemployed in the developing countries and up to 12 or 15 per cent in the richest, there are plenty of human resources which could be mobilised.

The goal of socialism is not based on utopian schemes drawn up by radical dreamers, but as Marx argued: "it emerges from capitalist society." How does it emerge? From the mass struggles by workers for a better world.

We need a revolution because there is no other way to take power out of the hands of those who rule today, and because the method of popular revolution - collective, democratic organisation - lays the foundations of a new society. Solidarity is the key to a strong movement, and that requires overcoming divisive ideas like racism, sexism, religious bigotry and nationalism. The struggles to end war, racism and poverty, for women's rights, the right to have a trade union and a decent wage, for a clean environment, are essential steps on the road to socialism.

We can't - and nor should we - write a blueprint for everything a socialist society would do, but we can look at

workers' struggles in the past. Whenever our struggles have risen to such a height that they threatened capitalist rule, they have created the most democratic, inclusive organs of power ever seen in history. In Russia (where they first appeared in 1905) they were called soviets, in English, workers' councils, in

Spanish cordones, and in Persian shora.

Delegates are elected in the workplaces, neighbourhoods, universities. But instead of becoming wealthy politicians living a life separated from their electors, they continue as workers, sharing the conditions they vote for. And they can be replaced by new

delegates at any time.

But, object the sceptics, it isn't possible to build this society just in one country, we live in a globalised world. That's true, and any revolution will need to spread to other countries, but the increasing globalisation of the world makes international crisis inevitable. Just think of the wave of struggles that have swept through Latin America since 2000, or the revolutionary movements that swept the entire world in the 1960s and '70s.

### But what happened in Russia?

How do we know that a workers' revolution won't end like Russia? The Stalinist dictatorship was not the inevitable outcome of workers' revolution, it was the result of a complete counter-revolution which destroyed the inspiring advances made by Russian workers. In fact, the defeat proves the Marxist argument that socialism can only be built by the rule of the working class and cannot survive in one country.

With Russia left isolated by the defeat of the revolutions which swept Europe after 1917, it was not possible to build a classless society. War, civil war, invasion by all the imperialist powers and sabotage by capitalists left the economy

at a lower level of production in 1921 than in 1912, and the working class almost non-existent. Without a mass of workers, the soviets became a shell and a new bureaucracy emerged out of the chaos to rule over the economy. This bureaucracy, under the rule of Stalin, overturned everything the revolution stood for and out of the ruins built a new capitalist society under their state control. None of the other states that claim the mantle of Communism ever had a workers' revolution, so they cannot carry through the transition to a classless society.

The tradition of the Stalinist states and their claim to be "socialist" or "communist" means there is a widespread idea on the left that workers' control over society is an optional extra in the fight for socialism. That's why *Green Left Weekly* could "classify China as a bureaucratically ruled socialist state" without recognising this as an oxymoron; why it could admit to "the Stalinist bureaucracy's totalitarian methods of rule, which crushed any independent working-class political activity" - and yet insist Russia was on the road to socialism until its collapse in the early 1990s.

Numerous Google searches failed to find a definition of socialism which included human liberation, or unequivocally included control over how society is organised by the mass of people, apart from articles like this one. Socialism, we're told, refers to any number of ideologies. But let's be clear, these ideologies are not just about different strategies to arrive at the same goal, but about different goals. Any idea that a state with an army separate from the mass of the population and an elite organising production can bring about genuine socialism is utopian. Socialism can only be built once workers have seized and held onto political control, enabling them to destroy the repressive state that capitalists use to reinforce and defend their economic power.

*Sandra Bloodworth  
from Socialist Alternative*

# Is Venezuela on the road to socialism?

*Continued From Back Page...*

However reform from the top can only go so far. Capitalism cannot be abolished and socialism introduced by government decree. Workers can only liberate themselves by a mass mobilisation from below that overthrows the old state machine and places power directly in their hands.

In Venezuela today, despite Chávez's reforms, the old state machine and army are still intact and loyal to capitalist privilege. Most of Venezuela's big business leaders remain in charge of their enterprises – and Chávez insisted in a recent speech that there was still an important role for the "national bourgeoisie".

The threat of a right-wing coup remains, but has receded. Anti-Chávez business leaders seem willing to bide their time for now, as booming oil exports spur Venezuela to some of the world's highest growth rates and boosts their profits. They and their US backers will likely be forced into a long-term strategy of trying to delegitimise the Chávez government. On the other side, the desire among the mass of workers, urban poor and peasants for fundamental change continues to grow. And for its part the revolutionary left is organising to press for more radical change – and to give a working class content to Chávez's call for "socialism for the 21st century".

Some 10,000 left-wing activists from unions, indigenous peoples, community

organisations and peasant groups marched in Caracas in the lead-up to the elections, both to show support for Chávez's re-election and to call for deepening the revolutionary process through a decisive turn towards socialism. The numbers on this march may seem small in comparison to the massive pro-Chávez election rally the following week, but the event highlights the growth of a Venezuelan left rooted in the struggles of the poor.

This is in contrast to the 2004 presidential election, when the far left had a much weaker profile. The far left has also strengthened its position within the trade union movement.

The Class Struggle Current is the majority force within the UNT union federation. It is opposed by a minority moderate current that favours closer ties between the union movement and the Venezuelan state, whereas the Class Struggle Current stresses the need for independent unions, rank-and-file activism and an aggressive stance in bargaining for public and private employees.

The split in the UNT is part of a wider debate on the need for "revolution within the revolution". This pressure from the left underscores the contradictions of the "Bolivarian revolution". On the one hand, workers and the poor have been activated by the state's reforms; on the other, the employers have not yet been squeezed, let alone expropriated, by workers.

As tumultuous as recent years have been in Venezuela, much more struggle is to



*Bush is the Devil: Chavez calls it like it is at the UN.*

come – and its impact will be felt across Latin America and around the world. But if we are to genuinely see "socialism for the 21st century", workers are going to have to push further forward and establish their own democratic organisations to take control of the whole of society.

**Mick Armstrong**  
*from Socialist Alternative*

## Why are socialists militants?

Socialists are commonly asked why we take such a militant, combative attitude towards politics. Surely, doesn't pitting "us" (the workers) against "them" (the capitalists) perpetuate the conflict we seek to end? Wouldn't it be better to convince the capitalists of the good of socialism peacefully? To understand why socialists are militants we must understand where the conflict in society actually comes from. Conflict in class society comes not merely from an ideological divide ("us and them"), but from material conflicts of interest between classes. Capitalists must constantly increase their profits or they will be driven out of business. Workers must constantly increase their wages because the cost of living is always rising.

Since both wages and profit come from the same "pool of cash" (e.g. the revenues of a factory), they cannot both increase, gains made by one class are at the expense of the other, and conflict ensues.

A technical note here is that it is actually the proportion of wages and profits that matters, not their absolute value. If a capitalist increases their profits at the same rate as their rivals, they have not secured any competitive advantage over them. Likewise, if wages were to rise at the same rate as profits (roughly the rate of inflation), workers will be no better off than they were before.

It follows then, that an "us and them" mentality is a manifestation of this conflict, not its driving force. Class

divisions can't be dissolved simply by trying to convince capitalists that socialism is good, because for capitalists, socialism is bad. Capitalists survive through profit, and for a capitalist to adopt a worldview that calls for the redistribution of "their" profits amongst workers would be suicidal. Workers, on the other hand, survive through collective action such as uniting in a union to win better wages at the expense of their boss. For a capitalist to end class society and its inherent war, oppression, environmental destruction and greed would be suicidal. If we want a better world, it must be forced from them by the mass of organized workers.

**Cory Anderson**

# A battle lost but the war goes on

*In the second round run-off of the French presidential elections on 6 May, right wing candidate Nicolas Sarkozy won the presidency with 53 per cent of the votes, on a record turnout of 86 per cent. This constitutes a serious defeat for French workers. Sarkozy ran his campaign under the slogan "work more to earn more" and has promised to make generalized strikes illegal in some public services and transport. He also aims to attack labour contract law which has held up better (due to workers' resistance) in France than in other European countries.*

During the campaign he played down his enthusiastic support for Bush's imperialist wars, but he trumpeted his desire to clamp down on illegal immigrants and massively reduce taxes for the rich.

It can seem hard to understand that after massive and popular youth and workers' movements like the victorious movement against the notorious Youth Employment Contract in 2006, the French voters should have chosen such a reactionary president.

The fundamental explanation is the failure

of the parliamentary left to persuade ordinary people that its victory would improve their lives much. Ségolène Royal, the defeated Socialist Party candidate, even if she sprinkled some left-wing social measure into her programme, talked more of law and order and the centrality of economic competition. "I want to make France a country of entrepreneurs", she announced.

In the absence of a convincing social programme, many were more tempted by Sarkozy's moral certainties - attacking "bad immigrants" and integrating good

ones, clamping down on unemployed "shirkers", cutting public expenditure - a classic scapegoating approach. There will be a period of demoralization, but big wildcat strikes during the campaign show that workers' resistance will be very much on the agenda, and there are many big battles to come. Right now all French political parties are in serious crisis, because of the fact that neither the ruling class nor the working class has managed to make a decisive breakthrough over the last few years.

## Massive politicization

The campaign was followed closely by many millions of workers. Peak time political interviews of more than an hour in length got TV audiences of eight or nine million watching them. Mass meetings of all candidates attracted record numbers. In the first round campaign, this interest helped not just the mainstream parties but also the radical left. Rallies of the radical left candidates (there were four of them, five if you include the Greens) drew thousands at a time, night after night. The websites of the radical left were inundated with visits. The political situation was highly polarised.

From the point of view of the left the main element to keep in mind is the huge gap between the level of anger and class struggle, and the implantation and influence of left political organizations. Despite huge mass movements in 2003 and 2006, the victory against the European constitution in 2005 and the riots in 2005, no left organization has become significantly larger and more influential. This is the background for the general desire for a new united political force, which is harder to get than to dream of. Poor election results for the radical left Results from the first round of voting are presented in Table 1. Taken as a whole, the results of the radical left were not good compared to 2002. Three million more people voted this time round, but the radical left as a whole got two million fewer votes. This is the lowest radical left vote for a decade. This despite our much higher profile during the campaign, and the stunning success of many of the mass meetings, in particular those of Bové and of Besancenot.

Let's look at the most important results on the left. The right would be a subject for another article.

The Socialist party candidate, Ségolène Royal, got 25.8% in the first round and 47% in the second round run-off on a record turnout. Ségolène Royal, and her programme, are the result of a



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Besancenot (LCR)	1,498,581	4.08%
Buffet (Communist)	707,268	1.93%
Bayrou ("Centre-Right")	6,820,119	18.57%
Bové (For a United Radical Left)	483,008	1.32%
Laguiller (Workers Struggle)	487,857	1.33%
Voynet (Greens)	576,666	1.57%
De Villiers (Far right)	818,407	2.23%
Royal (Socialist Party)	9,500,112	25.87%
Sarkozy (Right)	11,448,663	31.18%
Le Pen (Front national)	3,834,530	10.44%

*The results of the first round<sup>1</sup>: Bear in mind that we can never know how many votes are "protest votes", how many are "tactical votes" and how many reflect real agreement with programmes and principles. Everybody understands that they are not electing someone when they vote in the first round*

compromise inside her party. Royal is not Blair from 1997. Blair had already crushed the left of his party and was busy holidaying with billionaires and declaring New Labour to be "the party of business" before 1997. Royal is only at the very beginning of such a process. The internal life of the Socialist Party remains a (distorted) reflection of class struggle and the left still has a lot of influence. The left of the PS was very influential in the 2005 victory against the

ultraliberal European Constitution. The strength of this left and, even more, the mass strikes and movements of the last few years have obliged Royal to include several clearly left-wing measures in her programme. She proposed building 120,000 units of social housing a year and making pension increases for poorer pensioners. She proposed reserving development grants to companies who promise not to lay off workers, and she said she would massively increase the number of crèche places available in public nurseries.

At the same time, she was playing very hard some right-wing policies (military-style camps for young "delinquents"...), and was praising the French flag to the heavens ("every family should have one"). More importantly there were almost no promises to reverse key right-wing laws brought in over the last few years. No one thought Royal would be renationalizing public industries. No one thought she wouldn't continue to attack pensions "because they cost too much". No one thought she would withdraw French troops from Afghanistan and elsewhere. And she was clearly declaring that

***The fundamental explanation is the failure of the parliamentary left to persuade ordinary people that its victory would improve their lives***

"economic competitiveness" was her central principle.

Royal gave her speeches to packed houses (and in sports stadiums) of up to 20,000 at a time in the highly charged atmosphere of this campaign. Even so, the most notable fact about Royal's campaign may have been its emptiness. After 5,000 neighbourhood meetings "to discover what the people want", in the name of "participatory democracy", she claimed to have found that the

French people have "a deep desire for a future" (good sign, I suppose), and she has therefore decided to promise "Justice and order so that France can get back on her feet".

The "participatory democracy" circus, along with a recruitment campaign to the Socialist Party (new cut-price joining costs 20 euros by internet) aimed at diluting the weight of the PS activist base, on average more left-wing than its leaders.

## **The radical left - the dangers of purism and sectarianism**

The story of the radical left - all those to the left of the Socialist Party - in France since 2005 is a little complex but needs to be understood. The ultraliberal European constitution was defeated at a referendum in 2005 due to the efforts of the radical left, who ran an extraordinary united campaign where dissident Greens, dissident Socialists, and Trotskyists and Communists [Stalinists], along with a massive non-party left, worked closely and enthusiastically together.

After this victory, and this new deepening of joint mass work, the hundreds of United Radical Left committees around the

country did not disband. Instead they wrote a programme (known as the 125 proposals) and transformed themselves into committees for a United Radical Left candidacy for the presidential elections and for the following parliamentary elections set for June 2007. The idea was a collective candidacy, both moving away from the dangerous personalizing of these elections, and allowing for a strong voice for radical change.

The 125 proposals are pretty radical stuff : indexing wages on prices, banning stock options, banning redundancies in companies that are making a profit; a move towards the 32 hour week, papers for all illegal immigrants, a reversal of recent attacks on education, higher taxes for the rich, to cite just a few examples. However, the functioning of the committees was not without its problems. The Communist Party generally worked inside them, but most of it hoped and planned that the CP general secretary, Marie-George Buffet, would be chosen as the candidate of unity.

The LCR majority faction refused to work seriously with the committees, emphasised (sometimes imaginary) divisions, and frequently remained "as an observer" at the meetings nationally and locally in order to lecture everyone on pure anticapitalist politics. The LCR minority (almost a third of the organization) worked enthusiastically in the United Radical Left committees, trying to minimise the damage done by the sectarian majority.

As the election came closer, both the Communist Party and the LCR decided to run standalone candidates, basically for sectarian reasons.

At this point, the United Radical Left committees, reduced to the non-party left and a fair number of dissident Communists, dissident LCR, and dissident Greens, were thrown into crisis. At the eleventh hour the majority of the United Radical Left committees decided to ask José Bové (leader of a small-farmers' Union and well-known campaigner for ecology and for other issues such as Palestine) to stand as the candidate of unity. Twenty spokespeople were named for the collective campaign, including leading dissident Greens, Communists and LCR, as well as union and other campaigning leaders. The idea was not to run a campaign claiming to have a different programme to those of the other radical left candidates, but on the contrary, to say that separate candidacies were stupid and that only with unity could a real difference be made.

That then is the background. Let's look at what happened on the first round polling day. For each candidate we have to look

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both at how the electorate, and in particular the working class, reacted to their programme, but also, and crucially, what effect their programme and strategy had on activist circles and on people who are ready to get stuck into struggle. If we don't look at both, we can fall into electoralism. And it is particularly important in France to look at both, because first round voting has a tradition of including a large number of "protest voters" whose attachment to the long term aims of the candidate they are voting for is in fact pretty weak.

## Radical left campaigns and results

So let's take a look at the significant<sup>ii</sup> left candidates one by one. Much to the left of Royal there was:

Buffet (Communist Party), Laguiller (Lutte Ouvrière), Besancenot (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), Bové (For

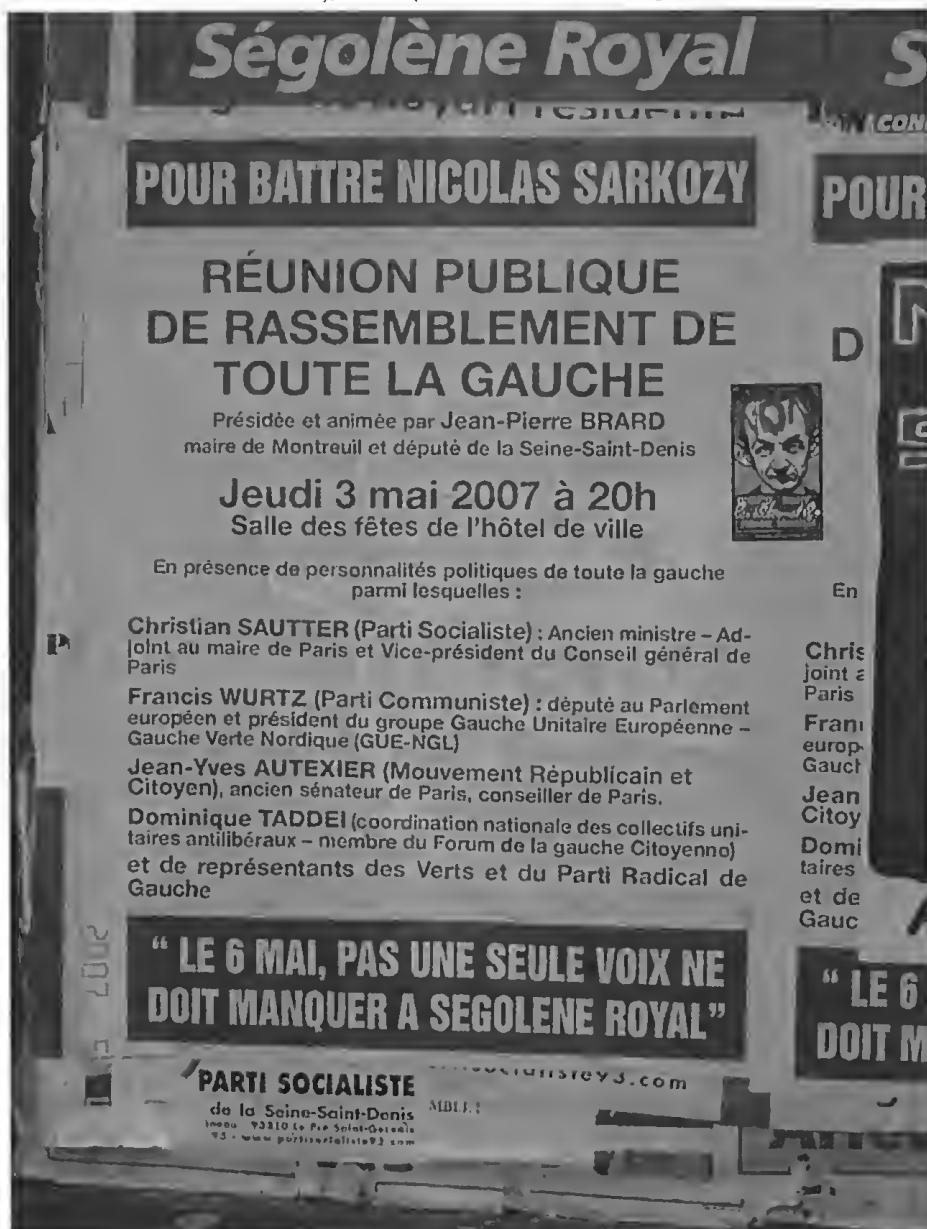
a United Radical Left<sup>iii</sup>) Marie-George Buffet, the Communist Party candidate, saw the CP vote collapse (from 3.37% in 2002 to 1.93% today). In part this was just the continuation of a practically continuous decline over the last thirty years. The PCF this time lost votes both to its right, where people who felt Buffet had distanced herself too much from the Socialist Party and governmental options preferred to vote for Royal, and also to its left, where people who had been disgusted with the party's manipulations around the United Radical Left candidacy abandoned the Communist Party.

This historically low score has deepened the internal crisis in the PCF. Quite a number of long-term activists have left to join forces with the United Radical Left committees. "Communists for Unity" a new current including a number of national leaders is slowly becoming an autonomous organization, with its own

meetings, conferences etc. appealing to "all those who identify with Communist culture, who have helped build the United Radical Left or who would like to get involved".

Arlette Laguiller, representing the Trotskyist organization "Workers' Struggle" (Lutte Ouvrière) also made a poor showing. The tactical voting tide is obviously one reason. In addition, Lutte Ouvrière have been on a very sectarian line these last ten years. They were fairly active in the mass movement against the First Employment Contract in 2006, but have been totally absent from - and sometimes even opposed to - some of the biggest and most popular mobilizations of recent years, since "non-workplace issues" hardly interest them. So they didn't join the committees to fight for a No vote on the European referendum, they didn't help organise the mass demos against Le Pen in 2002, and they all-but-denounced the huge European Social Forums in 2003 and 2004.

Of all the organizations of the Radical left, the LCR would seem, on the surface to have the most to celebrate this week. Olivier Besancenot's strategy and campaign resulted (as always in the LCR) from a compromise between different factions inside the organization, which explains an occasional lack of coherence. In general one can say that the electoral result was good, but that the effect of the strategy and the campaign on activist circles, union militants and the non-party left was little short of catastrophic. First the positive side. Besancenot got 4.08% of the vote. The deep involvement of the LCR in recent mass movements must have helped, and the score was particularly high in some working class areas and among young people. The campaign emphasised independence from the Socialist Party, and economic issues such as taxing the rich, and an immediate, substantial rise in the minimum wage. As a result of all this, he was able to resist to some extent the tide of tactical voting. For the mass of the electorate, of course, the LCR's major mistake in scuppering the possibility of a United Radical Left Candidacy a few months earlier meant little. But in activist circles and among the very large non-party left, the LCR has gained itself an image as a sectarian organisation which ignored a real dynamic of unity which could have allowed the Radical left to get a much higher score and laid the first foundations for a mass Radical left alternative. The reasonably good score of the LCR candidate has reinforced the most sectarian currents in the LCR (some to the point of caricature). The LCR has



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therefore, incredibly, refused to hold joint "anti-Sarkozy" meetings, concerts and other events along with other forces between the two rounds of the elections. In addition, the LCR leadership, while calling abstractly for unity is avoiding or sabotaging attempts to have United Radical Left candidacies in the June parliamentary elections. Tensions inside the LCR are running extremely high.

## José Bové and the committees for a United Radical Left

The campaign of José Bové was a surprise. Bové hesitated before accepting a widespread desire within the United Radical Left committees that he take up the banner for them. The campaign began with no party structure and a very heterogeneous base including some Communists, some Greens, some LCR, a lot of non-party left (sometimes ex-Communists) and a few anti-party people. The Bové campaign was based on the 125 proposals, the twenty spokespeople and was very much a collective campaign.

The tone was generally "we all need to rise up" rather than "this is what we could do for you". The meetings were a great success. Up to one hundred thousand people participated, with very many young people and very noticeably multi-ethnic crowds. Citizens' organizations from the poorer suburbs were very much present. Some Muslim organizations joined the coalition - Bové being the only one of the candidates with a clear understanding of Islamophobia and the only one who had openly and actively opposed the racist ban on Muslim headscarves in schools a couple of years back. Committees across the country organised imaginative street parties and concerts, while "Radical Left wine" was sold in the South, and in my town "Radical Left organic chickens". Bové also made clear from the beginning that the main enemy was the right-wing and that voting left in the second round was a matter of principle.

The problem was that the United Radical Left idea is still very young in the minds of the mass of the people, and there was little time to profoundly change this. Bové's vote (483,000 votes, 1.32%) was disappointing, but the campaign dynamic was really interesting and has built a precious base for the fight for a wider

radical left unity alternative.

LCR attempts to claim that the Bové campaign was different from their own had limited success, since on measure after measure, the two candidates were saying the same thing. The more sectarian members of the LCR were reduced to deliberately misunderstanding some of Bové's jokes...

Bové's was the only campaign which brought together activists from different organizations or none to work together. Its lack of party structure and tendency to spontaneity led to a certain amateurism and some mistakes. And the manipulations of the PCF leadership and the sectarian errors of the LCR leadership have strengthened the hand of anti-party currents within the United Radical Left committees.

These committees, which are now organizing "United against Sarkozy" events and pushing for United Radical Left candidacies in the parliamentary elections are heterogeneous but very promising structures. Along with the "Communists for Unity" (Communistes unitaires) they no doubt represent the most interesting new developments in left political organization in France for many years.

Obviously there is no guarantee that they will be able to grow significantly and to oblige sections of established

organizations to join forces with them to produce a credible political alternative.

## Conclusions

If the reader has the impression that the French radical left is one almighty mess in the midst of a very promising situation, then he or she has probably correctly understood my article. Nevertheless, many questions remain open.

Now Sarkozy is elected will the consequent demoralization of left and union militants be so deep that any progress building an alternative will be slowed down massively?

Will the LCR continue moving still further into sectarianism?

How quickly will the collapse of the Communist party progress, opening up a space to its left?

Will the "Communists for Unity" get stuck as a talking shop and too much of a mixed bag to build anything serious enough for action? They are planning a conference in the Autumn, which could interest many thousands of activists.

Will the Bové committees rebuild their



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dynamic after a poor election result and replace the amateurism and spontaneity with a more serious approach? Will anybody have a go at recruiting the next generation?

Certainly practically the whole of the radical left is very weak on looking outwards, engaging with large numbers of people, and trying to bring in the new generation of activists. It is as though old activists who have survived the hard times when there were few struggles, have got stuck in a rut of long meetings and waiting sceptically for anyone new to force their way in the door.

The radical left is in need of a lot of new vitality if it is to measure up to the situation of class polarization which France is deeply immersed in. The election campaign period has been marked by several important strikes and the struggle of undocumented immigrants, and it is very clear that on the ground, there is no class truce on the horizon.

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- (i) I have omitted two small candidates I have nothing to say about.
- (ii) I have omitted one Trotskyist candidate, Gérard Schivardi. Look him up on Wikipedia if you think he has any significance. I don't.
- (iii) This was not his official label.

# Afghanistan: Behind the refugee crisis

*In popular usage, the word "refugee" means those who seek safety in another country from economic, political, social distress including war, famine, or civil conflict in their own country. There must be a really strong reason to take such a big risk and become a refugee. Throughout history we have seen and listened to news about refugees especially whenever there is conflict or civil war.*

However, we must also understand who is behind the destitution of innocent people. We should ask ourselves why people are becoming refugees; and who shall we hold responsible? Is policy decided by the "international community" or by world superpowers like the United States and the Soviet Union? Although the Soviet Union has changed to Russia today, and its interference is less than the United States, it is not forgettable for those who suffered from Russian intervention, in countries like Chechnya and Afghanistan. But what actually have they done in the world, except killing

innocent people, burning factories, raping women, destroying houses, and making millions of people homeless?

Those living in countries that have seen and are still suffering from the bloody policy of these superpowers, ask why the international community does not take any action against them: Why we should not live in peace, in our own homeland, with our families? Many people are happy to face the economic problems, or even famine in their country, but bloody war makes them seek refuge. For example, many African countries have weak economies and famine and high cost of living. Nonetheless, people delight to live in their own country and are not scared of the bullet. But in countries like Somalia, which has had civil war for the past two decades, innocent people are forced to seek refuge, likewise in Afghanistan, Iraq etc.

Especially since the decline of the Cold War, political instability has plagued developing nations, civil wars often targeting civilian populations have produced millions of refugees worldwide. For more than two decades, Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Iraq have been suffering war. The world community has done nothing to end this system of war, because it is a system that demands wars without end. This adversity comes from interference from the so-called international community. The policy of United States in the

Middle East, throughout history, has been to intervene for its own interests without care for the people of countries like Lebanon, Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq.

The United States has been involved in Lebanon, Palestine, and Afghanistan for more than two decades, but what actually they have done? Has the United States brought peace in those countries? Has the US left the people to live in peace? Have the US and the international community rebuilt these countries? "NO" except for destruction, the United States has achieved nothing for these countries. For example it was the United States that supported the Saddam Hussein regime in fighting against Iran in the 1980s, supplying heavy weaponry to Saddam to spill the blood of Iranians – and selling arms to Iran as well. The same United States destroyed Saddam's regime and brought the bloodiest war among the Iraqis. It is obvious that the reason for the United States' intervention in these countries is because of oil in Arab countries and geographic control in Afghanistan. Overall, the United States has responsibility for the murder of millions of innocent people in those countries in the past two decades, including their new policy of blood for Iraq.

*An Afghan-New Zealander*



# How the US created Osama bin Laden

On 3 July 1979, US President Jimmy Carter, under advice from National Security Adviser Zbignew Brzezinski, signed the first directive allowing secret aid to be given to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime that had recently come to power in Afghanistan. It marked the beginning of a now infamous convergence of interests, which saw the CIA, the Saudi Arabian regime and the Pakistani Interservices Intelligence Directorate (ISI) equip and train the Islamist mujahideen resistance to the Soviet Union.

For the US, this was an immense opportunity. In the preceding 5 years, they had been booted out of both Vietnam and Iran. It had been "the most humiliating half decade in American history". Now they sought to hand the Soviet Union their own Vietnam by luring them into an intractable guerilla war in Central Asia.

Over more than a decade up to 35,000 fighters from the Muslim world were recruited, US\$10 billion worth of aid channelled (including, by 1987, 65,000 tons of arms), and a "ceaseless stream" of CIA and Pentagon officials helped to plan mujahideen operations. According to Stephen Coll, writing in *The Washington Post*, "at any one time during the Afghan fighting season, as many as 11 ISI teams trained and supplied by the CIA accompanied mujahideen across the border to supervise attacks... CIA operations officers helped Pakistani trainers establish schools for the mujahideen in secure communications, guerrilla warfare, urban sabotage and heavy weapons."

But not only this. They gave support to the most retrograde elements like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. His followers, according to journalist Tim Weiner, "first gained attention by throwing acid in the faces of women who refused to wear the veil". The reasoning of the CIA was simple: The more fanatical the fighters were, the more brutal they were, the better they would fight so the more support they should get. Ronald Reagan - the same man who denounced the African National Congress and the Palestine Liberation Organization for not renouncing violence - described the mujahideen as "freedom fighters." Reagan, now president, met in Washington with rebel leaders like

Abdul Haq, who openly admitted his responsibility for terrorist attacks, such as a 1984 bomb blast at Kabul's airport that killed at least 28 people.

Meanwhile, with CIA assistance, the mujahadeen greatly expanded opium production in areas under their control - turning Afghanistan into what one US official later described as the new Colombia of the drug world.

One of the first non-Afghan volunteers to join the ranks of the mujahideen was Osama bin Laden, hailing from a wealthy construction family in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden recruited 4,000 volunteers from his own country and developed close relations with the most radical mujahideen leaders. He also worked closely with the CIA, raising money from private Saudi citizens. By 1984, he was running the Maktab al-Khidamar, an organization set up by the ISI to funnel "money, arms, and fighters from the outside world in the Afghan war."

According to journalist John Cooley, "the CIA gave Osama free rein in Afghanistan, as did Pakistan's intelligence generals. They looked with a benign eye on the build-up of Sunni sectarian power in South Asia to counter the influence of Iranian Shi'ism of the Khomeiny variety".

By 1989 the Russians were exhausted. They indeed got their "Vietnam". News of the Soviet defeat saw champagne corks popping all over Washington. The cold war was about to become history -

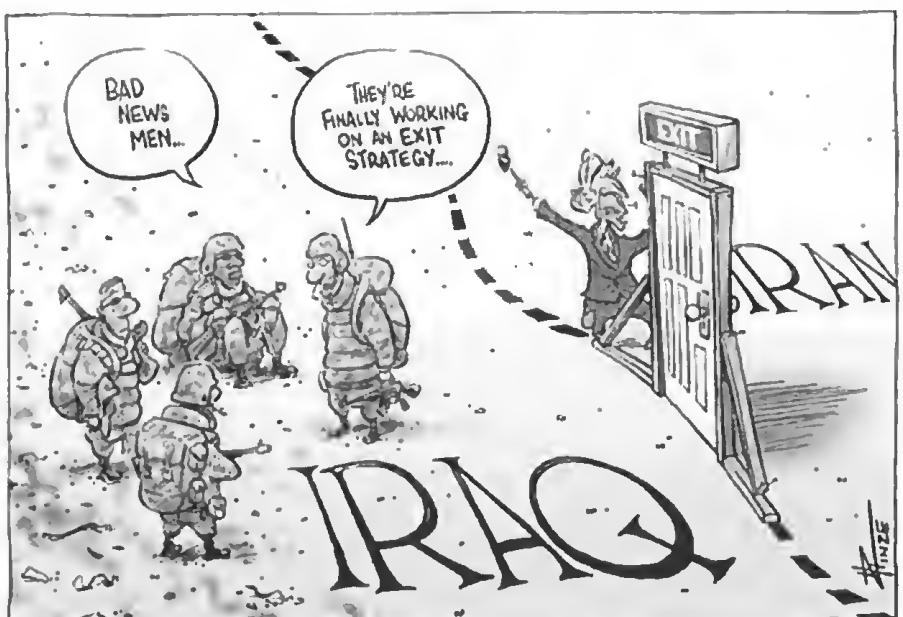
the US had triumphed. But when the USSR finally withdrew, the administration of George Bush Sr. turned its back on Afghanistan - leaving it, in the words of *The Economist*, "awash with weapons, warlords and extreme religious zealotry."

As the state funding from the Saudis and the US dried up, private financiers - like bin Laden himself - further stepped up their contributions to "the cause". The Soviets may have gone, but there were new targets, and they weren't limited to within Afghanistan's borders...

Looking back on his role in the conflict Zbignew Brzezinski asked (in 1998), "What is most important to the history of the world... some stirred up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?"

In light of the new "war on terror" Brzezinski's question is tragic. The hypocrisy is there for all to see: the "terrorists" of today were trained, funded and backed by modern imperialism yesterday. Bin Laden gave Bush just the excuse the US needed to go into Afghanistan again, and to follow it up with the obliteration of Iraq. That "war" shows that while bin Laden may have been a useful protege, the US is still the master when it comes to terror.

*Ben Hillier*



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# A colonial army on the warpath

**T**he Howard Government's so-called "humanitarian intervention" in East Timor is proving an increasingly threadbare cover for its neo-colonial and imperialist ambitions.

On 23 February, Australian soldiers shot at protesters at a refugee camp near Dili. One was killed immediately, another died next day and a third remains in a critical condition. They were part of a crowd of 8,000 terrified refugees (Internally Displaced People – IDP). With nowhere else to live and little prospect of being able to get food if they left, the refugees were resisting attempts to evict them from the camp.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and Brigadier Mal Rerden, the Australian Commander of the International Security Forces in East Timor, couldn't even wait for an official UN whitewash – sorry, investigation – they publicly cleared the soldiers involved and returned them to duty.

These killings – and others resulting from bungled attempts to capture the rebel leader Alfredo Reinado – have fed growing hostility among the East Timorese people towards Australian troops and anyone connected with the Australian government. Howard has used the expression of anti-Australian sentiment as a pretext to send a further 100 SAS troops to bolster the 800-strong Australian force already there.

Under the guise of "maintaining order", the troops have basically been engaged in repressing the population. Along with other security forces, Australian soldiers have been involved in clashes with refugees resisting eviction and with hungry people trying to seize rice from government warehouses. In the two days before the February shootings, 117 people were arrested in Dili.

East Timor is one of the poorest countries in the world – which didn't stop the Howard Government ripping off the lion's share of the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea on behalf of Australian capitalists after sending troops there in 1999. The extreme poverty and desperate hardship suffered by most of the population underlies the political crisis wracking the country.

Drought has led to food shortages and even higher levels of malnutrition than usual. Indeed food insecurity in East Timor is endemic, with the period leading



up to the start of the rainy season known as the "hungry season." Some 40 per cent of the population live below the official poverty line. About 100,000 of over 150,000 people displaced during last year's political crisis are still living in terrible conditions in IDP camps. But to the Australian government and media, hungry people fighting for food and shelter are simply perpetrators of "gang violence", and must be stopped by any means necessary. Such repression is aimed at restoring the stability so essential to the running of "business as usual".

It was not concern for the people of East Timor that led to renewed Australian military intervention in May last year, but concern for the profits of the Australian businesses that dominate the region – and wish to continue doing so. Not content to knuckle under to Australian capitalism, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri was looking for alternative

economic partners – most significantly to China, which is investing billions in East Timor.

The growing Chinese presence could alter the balance of power in the region and threaten Australia's economic and strategic interests. The prospect of China getting effective control of East Timor's sea lanes, for example, is the stuff of nightmares for the Australian ruling class. So Howard essentially organised a coup against Alkatiri, backing the more right-wing and compliant José Ramos Horta to take his place.

Australia's intervention is an exercise in imperialism. It's all about securing resources and regional influence for the Australian state and capitalist class against their rivals. And as more and more Timorese are discovering, Australian troops are there to ruthlessly suppress any local opposition to this agenda.

*Tess Lee Ack*

## FURTHER READING

### Workers' Revolutions of the 20th Century \$5

Of all the arguments that socialists make, the insistence on the need for revolution is perhaps the most controversial. Not, in many cases, because the idea of revolution seems bad, but mostly because it seems so unrealistic. And yet a brief look at the recent history of capitalism shows not only that revolutions happen, but that they keep happening again and again, sometimes despite seemingly overwhelming odds. This pamphlet documents just some of the working class revolutions of the last century: Russia in 1905 and 1917, Germany 1918-23, Hungary 1956, Chile 1972-73, Iran 1979 and Poland 1980-81. The accounts testify to the courage and creativity of working people when they organise and fight back. But while this history shows that revolutionary outbreaks are inevitable, they also show that victory for the oppressed masses is far from certain. So in looking at this history, the authors have tried to draw lessons for the future.

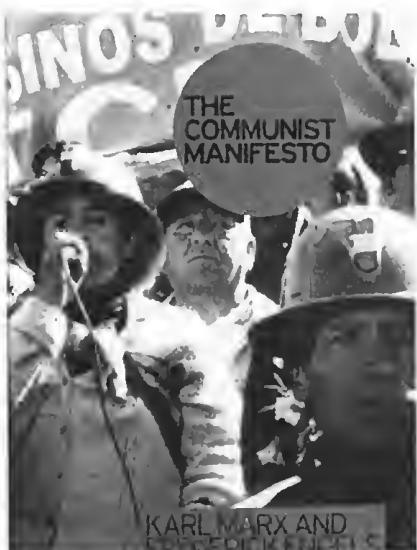
### Reform or Revolution \$3

*Rosa Luxemburg*

Luxemburg wrote this essential pamphlet in opposition to the important theorist of reformist socialism, Eduard Bernstein, whose ideas became popular in the German Socialist Party around the turn of the 20th Century. In this pamphlet, Luxemburg points out that reformism is not just a different road to the same socialist end that revolutionaries espouse, but a road to a different destination altogether.

### WORKERS' REVOLUTIONS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE PAMPHLET



### The Socialist Movement: Our History \$6

The history of the socialist movement is rich with lessons for those wanting an alternative to the horrors of modern capitalism. This pamphlet introduces the real story of our movement.

### The Communist Manifesto \$6

*Karl Marx & Frederick Engels*

The introduction to Marxism by its founders. The Manifesto of the Communist Party was written just before the revolutions of 1848, as the public expression of the ideas of the German Communist League, of which Marx and Engels were leading members.

### Essays on Nationalism and Revolution in the Arab World \$6

*Socialist Alternative*

These essays looks at the politics of nationalism, socialism and Islamism in the Arab world, and examines the different strategies these currents present as a way forward for the Arab revolution.

## Join the Struggle

*Socialist Review* is a magazine produced by the International Socialist Organisation Aotearoa. It aims to provide quality political analysis that represents the interests of the working class majority in New Zealand. But unlike "alternative" media sources, we don't aim simply to provide an "antidote" to the corporate lies, imperialist wars, oppression and inequality that dominate the global landscape; we aim to put them into historical and economic context, to draw links between the various issues and the global capitalist system, and analyse what they mean for ordinary working people and the working class movement, both at home and abroad. To do this we try and maintain a healthy balance of domestic and international issues.

We also practice what we preach, and support the working class movement whenever we can, with the long-term aim of building an organisation that can provide the working class with political leadership in times of upheaval.

If you're interested in our politics and want to know how you can get involved, please email: [contact@iso.org.nz](mailto:contact@iso.org.nz) or visit our website: [www.iso.org.nz](http://www.iso.org.nz)

# The highest stage of capitalism

Lenin's "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism" is available online at <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/index.htm>

When ANZ and Air New Zealand offices burned in Tonga last year, New Zealand troops were hurriedly sent to "restore order" – and prevent any further damage to "our" business interests. In the Solomon Islands and East Timor, NZ and Australian forces have also been deployed to defend an order that allows foreign logging and mining corporations to make millions while Solomon Islanders live in poverty. In the same way that Australia and New Zealand regard the Pacific as our backyard, other major powers also use military force or the threat of it to maintain an "order" that suits them, although this truth is always surrounded by a bodyguard of lies – about law and order, freedom and democracy, or the threat of terrorism. The use of force by major powers to divide and re-divide the world is not

new. When capitalism first emerged in Western Europe, it expanded rapidly across the globe. As companies grew and merged, the free market of early capitalism became increasingly dominated by monopolies whose foreign interests became inextricably intertwined with those of the nation state. After the imperial powers carved up Africa in 1884, the entire world was effectively divided into the spheres of competing capitalist powers. This process – the transformation of free market capitalism into monopoly capitalism – marked the beginning of a new era – imperialism.

Lenin's classic work on imperialism was written during the First World War, an inevitable result of imperialist rivalry. It is an enormous aid to understanding the dynamics of modern capitalism. He traces the development of monopoly from the system of free competition and explains the implications for foreign policy. Particularly important is the development of "finance capital", as the

banking sector transformed itself from a middleman between competing businesses to the overlords of whole economies.

Lenin illustrates and details his theory throughout with examples, facts and figures, taken mostly from mainstream economists. While the specific examples are of course dated, the modern versions of the companies named aren't hard to find – Gazprom, Halliburton, Shell, and BP spring readily to mind. The quality of Lenin's research and writing – especially bearing in mind that this work was done in conditions often of poverty alongside more immediate political work – puts modern politicians and academics to shame. *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* is essential reading for all socialists and everyone who wants to understand the world in order to change it.

Cory Anderson

## Monopoly for Marxists?

### The man:

Bertell Ollman is a Professor of Politics at New York University, and is well-known for his contributions to theoretical debates in Marxist scholarship. In addition to his more serious work, he has a talent for writing humorous material intended for a more general audience, which aims to make Marxist ideas accessible to a wider readership. *Ball Buster? True Confessions of a Marxist Businessman* is one of them, and tells the story of Ollman's foray into the world of board games, inspired by the idea that in the act of playing a game, people are not only exposed to ideas, they get to see first hand how the ideas work in practice. So, like in Monopoly, when we all temporarily become consumed with a desire to acquire all the property and money by the end of the game (this can happen even if you are the most committed Marxist), we also see a watered down, simplistic and rosier (after all, it starts out fair) version of the monopolistic tendencies of capitalism. Ollman saw the potential in this idea and designed a board game called Class Struggle in the late 1970s.

### The game:

The most interesting thing about the game Class Struggle is that, rather than players taking the part of individual actors, they take the role of classes: the major classes

being Workers and Capitalists, and the minor or allied classes being Farmers, Small Businessmen, Professionals and Students. Crucially, only the Workers and Capitalists can win or lose the game: the minor classes can only participate in winning or losing through forming strategic alliances with them. To make it even more exciting, there are six Confrontation squares: one "Life in the Factory", two "Elections", two "General Strikes" and the "Revolution". When the Workers or Capitalists or one of their allies lands on a Confrontation square, they get to decide whether they will call a Confrontation, the winner of which is the side with the most assets. The winner of the final Confrontation, the Revolution, is the winner of the game.

### The story:

*Ball Buster? True Confessions of a Marxist Businessman* tells the story of Ollman and his friends setting up the company Class Struggle, Inc. to produce and distribute the Class Struggle board game. It is a riveting read, full of excitement and worry, sometimes simultaneously. The ups range from selling the rights for the game to be produced in foreign languages around the world to widespread, mostly favourable media coverage. The downs include the ongoing battle to raise money to finance

the production of more games, balancing the demands of business with an academic career, and finally being sued for unpaid production costs.

Apart from being highly readable, the book also offers some useful insight into how Ollman combined being in business (even becoming a boss at one point) and being a Marxist. A good example of this is when the Class Struggle Inc. board are approached by workers engaged in an eight month strike at a book store that sold Class Struggle, asking them to stop supplying the game to the store until the strike was over. While they were sympathetic to the strike, they saw the circulation of the Class Struggle game as having an important role to play in the real class struggle, in that it challenges the way people think about the world. For this reason, they struggled with the decision trying to work out which was likely to have a greater overall positive impact on the struggle. The ultimate irreconcilability of acting in the best interests of a company and still remaining true to Marxist values was a source of serious concern for Ollman, and is an interesting topic for anyone interested in exploring class politics. The only pity is that although the book is highly entertaining, the game itself is sadly out of print.

Penny Hayes

# Sparta's war on terror

**300**, written and directed by Zack Snyder, based on the graphic novel by Frank Miller, starring Gerard Butler and Lena Headey.

Frank Miller's **300** has all the elements to make it a runaway box office success. Massive violence, gore, a sex scene in the first 15 minutes and hyper-stylized cinematography that makes you feel like you're playing a videogame. It's also a rank cesspool of racism, sexism, homophobia and "freedom-loving" pro-war propaganda.

**300**'s style, pro-war message and racism evoke Sergei Eisenstein's classic propaganda film *Alexander Nevsky*, a retelling of Russia's defense against the Holy Roman Empire, which was used as blatant pro-war propaganda in Russia in the lead-up to Second World War. But where *Nevsky* was artistically groundbreaking, and made by a man whose previous work was revolutionary in every sense of the word, **300** rehashes the same art direction as Miller's previous film *Sin City* and continues to spew the right-wing politics of its creator.

The movie **300** inaccurately follows the Battle of Thermopylae, a sort of Alamo for ancient Greece, where an army of about 4,000 Greeks - including 300 Spartans - faced a much larger army of Persians, commanded by King Xerxes. The eventual defeat of this small force is said to have rallied the rest of Greece for a final victory against the Persians.

The film is riddled with historical inaccuracies, but it's the ones that send clear right-wing messages that are the most alarming. The filmmakers go to great lengths to portray the Persians as evil, decadent, cruel and effeminate, unlike the manly men of Sparta.



The Persians employ a whole host of horrifying creatures, from deranged giants to a monster with bone-axes for arms, in contrast to the flawless chiseled bodies of the Greeks. Inexplicably, the Persians are mostly played by Black actors, or actors wearing dark body paint, going up against white Greeks, played by British actors.

Over and over again it is mentioned that the Persians fight with a slave army, and run a vast empire on slave labor. Not even once is it mentioned that all of Greek society, especially Sparta, kept slaves in extremely cruel bondage.

The incessant narration (that insists on describing every moment of the movie) points out that the Spartan force has some "freed slaves" in it, without pointing out that they had to be slaves first to be freed. Women in the film are mainly used as sex objects. The one powerful woman, Queen Gorgo of Sparta, ends up being raped by Theron, a Spartan politician who's bribed by the Persians to resist sending the entire Spartan army into battle.

The one satisfying moment of the film is when Gorgo gets her revenge by stabbing Theron and exposing his treason.

Homophobia gets its due as well in **300**, with the Persians - especially Xerxes - portrayed as effeminate and cruel. In one scene, the giant Xerxes implies that King Leonidas of Sparta will become his personal sex slave after the Spartans' defeat.

The most dangerous aspect of **300** is its blatant call for the West to attack Iran. Iran, after all, used to be called Persia, and the film pulls no punches in exhorting the "free and rational" West to defend itself against the Persian hordes. Queen Gorgo even utters the tired cliché "Freedom is not free!"

"By ancient Persia, they refer to modern Iran - whose soldiers are portrayed as bloodthirsty, underdeveloped zombies," points out Greek film critic Dimitris Danikas. "They are stroking racist instincts in Europe and America."

**Matt Korn**

# Dixie Chicks beat Bush backlash

In another sign that the times are changing, the Dixie Chicks won five Grammy awards in February, including best country album, record of the year and song of the year for their 2006 album "Taking the Long Way." This is an achievement in itself, but the Dixie Chicks won these awards in the teeth of an open conspiracy by music industry bosses to destroy the Chicks' career. The success of the Dixie Chicks at the Grammy Awards is a poke in the eye for the music industry bosses, who tried to drive them out of business after the

band said they were ashamed that Bush was, like them, also from Texas. There was much anti-war music during the Vietnam War era and it was powerful in that it provided a space for people to gather around. People like Bob Dylan and John Lennon were putting words to what ordinary people were thinking and feeling. Anti-Iraq war music is starting to emerge and the success that the Dixie Chicks have had will mean that protest songs may become bankable and therefore get more widespread exposure. The worm has turned...

"ordinary people" are so often looking for someone to take a stand and voice their feelings - that's where the ISO comes in - providing the words and arguments for what people already know at some level. Having these words is often enough to mobilise people in to action. Remember there are heaps of people pissed off with the world, give them something to gather around to fight back.

**Raewyn Sinclair**

# Labour's Kiwisaver = stealthy privatisation

Dear *Socialist Review*,

The budget is a shocker! Privatization is happening right under our noses and people don't even realise it. Perhaps with some foresight we can see what the government is hoping to implement in the future. They might stop paying superannuation altogether and instead leave it up to companies to set down rules about how much to give employees, or they might do a voluntary participation rule like National always talks about.

If we really think about it, what could privatization of superannuation lead to? Perhaps companies pushing to put the age of retirement up to 70 instead of 65? Whatever happened to government regulations on companies? Another shocking thing I heard in the news today was power prices around the country have skyrocketed in the last few years, but the government says it has no plans to regulate the price rises. I watched a documentary called *The Corporation* today (I highly recommend you see it if you haven't). It is just astounding the lengths some corporations will go in privatization, I found out that some American firms own the right to water (even rain water) in Bolivia and people end up paying up to a quarter of their two dollar a day average wage to buy water, one of the essentials for life. [25% water fee was defeated by the mass protests in Cochabamba in 2000 - ed.]

Any form of privatization that happens in New Zealand, people should be really concerned about because once it gets going it won't stop, until people do

something about it. I'm starting to seriously worry about the hospital system and education too. In ten years time will they both be privately owned as well?

The real concern for me is that for corporations profit for shareholders is always the primary motivation - not the welfare of people. One thing that is also of concern is that there is virtually no mainstream media coverage of the implications this budget has on students or future generations.

*Feilidh Dwyer*

## Students must support workers' rights

Dear *Socialist Review*,

The last few years has seen a dramatic increase in the amount of strikes, walkouts, pickets and other forms of industrial action. Time and again workers have struggled with their employers and their managers to try and get fair pay and condition deals. These have often been organised through local or national unions, and have had varying levels of success. Recently, a motion that OUSA (Otago University Students' Association) should formally oppose the continued US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan was proposed, and also that OUSA should support the locked out workers during the Countdown Lockout, as reported in the last issue of *Socialist Review*. It prompted the interesting comment from a couple of presidential candidates like Mike Baker and Holly Lawford-Smith

that OUSA's role is meant to be working in the interests of students, and not getting involved with workers' issues and politics.

This is a viewpoint that can be found within both student and industrial unions, as well as amongst their constituents, but when analysed even briefly, it makes no sense whatsoever. In the mid-20th century, rising levels of mass production and industrialisation meant that there was increasing demand for highly technically skilled workers able to use the machines and processes

***When workers go on strike, they should be able to rely on student support. In turn, when students demand limits on fees increases, a minimum wage and the like, they should be able to rely on union support.***

being developed. This forced governments worldwide to massively increase the availability of tertiary education, and since then students have been intrinsically linked with workers, and thus with class politics. Even though students are theoretically between classes, able to move forward to become either workers or capitalists, which class they end up in is indeterminate and statistically the majority of students will end up in the workforce within 3 or 4 years. As such, students in general stand to gain a lot more from fighting for workers' rights. Student interests and workers' politics are not separate – they are exactly the same. When students in France took to the streets in May 1968 to protest deplorable conditions and rising police brutality they were joined by workers and unions, beginning one of the most powerful revolutionary movements of the last century.

When workers in Dunedin go on strike, they should be able to rely on student support. In turn, when students demand fair limits on fees increases, a reasonable minimum wage and the like, they should be able to rely on union support as was shown recently in Auckland with the Unite! union. Workers and students are not different. We have the same long-term goals, and we need to recognise the importance of working together to create a fairer, better world.

*Kevin Hodder*



Endangered species: The Kiwi bird and the Kiwi retirement



# WHERE WE STAND

## Socialism

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

## Workers' Power

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want. Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power - a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils. China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.



## Revolution Not Reformism

Despite the myth of parliamentary democracy, the structures of parliament, the army, the police and the judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class majority. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

## Internationalism

Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

## Liberation From Oppression

We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Maori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence. All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

## Tino Rangatiratanga

We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga. Maori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Maori. The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Maori elite while doing little for working class Maori. Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

## Revolutionary Organisation

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day-to-day activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

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# FORWARDS



## Venezuela puts socialism on the agenda

**V**enezuelan President Hugo Chávez symbolises opposition to both US imperialism and to the neoliberal economic policies that have devastated the lives of hundreds of millions of people all over the planet. With his denunciation of George Bush as "the devil" and his talk of "socialism for the 21st century" Chávez appears to offer a radical alternative to the rampant free market policies that have dominated world politics for more than twenty years.

Following his re-election in December with a record 63 per cent of the vote, Chávez stepped up his left-wing rhetoric, declaring: "Trotsky said that the revolution was permanent, it never finishes. Let's go with Trotsky."

He announced that the electricity system and the largest telecommunications company would be renationalised and the oil industry would be brought under greater state control. He pushed new legislation through parliament giving him decree powers to improve the living standards of the poor, extend communal councils and lead to the formation of workers' councils in thousands of workplaces.

Over the last few years Chávez has used the surge in government revenue brought about by skyrocketing oil prices to boost living standards. The percentage of the population living in poverty fell from 44 per cent in 1998 to about 34 per cent today. The number of those considered extremely poor dropped from 17 per cent to nearly 10 per cent.

Yet when Chávez was first elected president in 1998 it was on a mildly reforming program, not markedly different from the likes of mainstream European social democracy or Lula in Brazil.

### What explains the sharp shift to the left?

Free market austerity policies had ravaged Venezuela during the 1980s and '90s, creating mass discontent and leading to the 1989 Caracazo rebellion. Chávez was voted into office on the back of this discontent.

However the super-rich that ruled Venezuela made it clear from the outset of Chávez's government that they would not tolerate even the mildest of reforms. Egged on by the Bush administration, the Venezuelan ruling class launched a military coup in April 2002 to overthrow Chávez. The coup was beaten back by a tremendous mobilisation of the urban poor who poured out of their barrios to defend the government they had voted for. Then in late 2002 the ruling class again tried to bring

Chávez to heel by cutting off oil production by means of a "strike" – in reality a lockout by top oil company executives and technical personnel. But the lockout was broken by rank and file oil workers and soldiers who gradually revived production. The defeat of the coup and the oil lockout deepened the radicalisation of the mass of the urban poor and the working class and saw the emergence of the new left-wing UNT union federation that broke with the old union leaders who had been in the pockets of the bosses. Chávez responded to this radical mood by shifting his rhetoric to the left, and the oil boom gave him space to deliver gains to his supporters without having to redistribute wealth from the rich.

Over the past two years the oil boom has given workers greater confidence and room to organise and demand stepping up the pace of the "Bolivarian revolution". The growing radicalisation meant that Chávez had no problem heading off the challenge from the right in last December's elections.

However, the election campaign saw growing criticism by left-wing activists of the Chávista electoral parties for their foot dragging, and lack of commitment to fundamental change. Many of the middle-class politicians who have attached themselves to Chávez's bandwagon are either corrupt timeservers, unreconstructed Stalinists or supporters of a policy of greater compromises with big business and the right-wing. But it is not only the opportunist electoral parties that claim to embrace socialism while in reality refusing to break with capitalism that are the problem. Workers also have to contend with a public service still headed by bureaucrats loyal to the old ruling class who are determined to frustrate all radical initiatives. Chávez has attempted to deal with this problem by creating communal councils to take responsibility for some state services. He has attacked corruption and called on workers and the poor to step up pressure on government officials.

*Continued on page 11...*